1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

and XIX; the birdskin kilt (put on for the purpose) is illustrated in plate XVIII, while the aboriginal fabric is fairly represented in plate XXIX. Although ordinarily worn as a kilt, the same article (temporarily replaced by an improvised substitute) serves other purposes at the convenience of the wearer; in the chase for tunas and for moving game it becomes a bag or pack-sheet; in case of cold rain it is shifted to the shoulders or the exposed side; during the siesta it is elevated on a shrub and a stick to serve as a canopy; at sleeping time generally it forms (especially when of birdskin) a bed, i. e., a combined mattress and coverlet; and in attack or defense the pelican skin is at once standard, buckler, and waving cape to confuse quarry or enemy after the manner of the toreador's cloak.

An almost equally distinctive garment is a short shirt or wammus, with long sleeves, worn by men and women but not by children; ordinarily it covers the thorax, missing connection with the kilt by a few inches, and so affording ventilation and space for suckling the teeming offspring. Unlike the kilt, it is an actual garment, fitted with sleeves and fastened in front with hair-cord strings. Although the Seri wammus corresponds fairly with a Yaqui garment, it seems practically certain that it is of local aboriginal design, and that it was made primitively of haircloth or native textiles (as illustrated in plate XXIX) and worn rather ceremoniously; but latterly it is made of manta and is worn habitually (at least by the women and on the frontier), though cast aside in preparation for any special task or effort—i. e., it is not connected with modesty-sense, save to a slight degree in the younger women. The form, function, and prevalence of the wammus are illustrated by the group shown in plate XIII, in which nearly all of the thirty-odd adults wear the garment.

These two articles constitute the ordinary wearing apparel of the Seri, though they are commonly supplemented (especially when both are of manta) by a pelican-skin robe, which is habitually carried to serve as bed or mackintosh, according to the chance of journey and weather, or as a shield in sudden warfare. No head-covering is used, save in the ceremonial masquerade, when the heads of animals are worn as masks,[1] or in aping Caucasian customs, especially on expeditions for barter (as illustrated in plate XII). Loose trousers of Mexican pattern are sometimes put on at frontier points, but are discarded in Seriland proper, save by Mashém, who maintains prestige partly by this borrowed badge of Caucasian superiority. Leggings and moccasins are eschewed, naturally enough, since they would afford little protection from the sharp spalls and savage thorns of the district, and would give lodgment for the barbed spines inevitably gathered in rapid chase or flight over cactus-dotted stretches; and the only foot-covering seen (save Mashém's boots) was a single sandal made from the rough skin of a turtle-flipper, apparently for ceremonial rather than practical use.

[1] Hardy (Travels, p. 230) describes the ceremonial wearing of the heads of deer with horns attached.

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

291 [177] Of all the party at Costa Rica in 1894 subchief Mashém was the only one who wore Caucasian apparel with any air of comfort and fitness; yet even he, with hat and shirt, boots and breeches, and loose bandana about his neck in cowboy style (plate XVII), did not feel fully dressed without the slender hair-cord necklace of his kin in its wonted place. On the frontier improvised fig-leaves were sometimes put on the children of less than a dozen years (as illustrated by the standing infant shown in plate XIV, who was thus dressed hastily for her picture); and a common garb of the smaller children at Costa Rica, as they played about the rancheria or wandered in directions away from the white

[412] [854]

FIG. 29—Seri hairbrush.

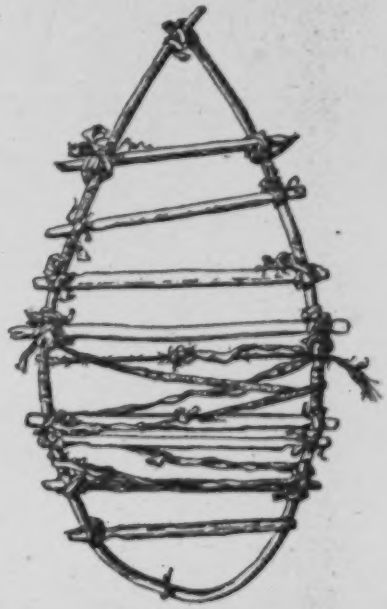

FIG. 30—Seri cradle.

man's rancho, was limited to a cincture of hair cord or snake skin, or perhaps of agave fiber, under which an improvised kilt might be tucked on the Caucasian's approach.

281 513 In addition to the individual apparel, each clan, or at least the elder woman or her fraternal executive, accumulates some surplus material as opportunity offers, and this serves as family bedding until occasion arises for converting it to other uses. Of late the prevailing materials are pelican skins, lightly dressed and joined into robes by sinew stitching; deerskins, dried or partially dressed; cormorant skins, treated like those of the pelican; seal skins, usually fragmentary; peccary skins,

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

apparently dried without dressing, together with skins of rabbits, mountain sheep, antelope, etc, usually tattered or torn into fragments. Commonly the hides and pelts are nearly or quite in natural condition, retaining the hair, fur, or feathers. The dressing is apparently limited to scratching and gnawing away superfluous flesh, followed by some rubbing and greasing; tanning is apparently unknown. By far the most abundant of the collective possessions are the pelican-skin robes, which form the sole article of recognized barter with aliens. The aggregate stock accumulated at any time is but meager, never too much to be borne on the heads and backs of the clan in case of unexpected decamping.

Aside from the painting paraphernalia, there is but a single conspicuous toilet article; this is a hair-brush made of yucca fiber bound into cylindrical form, as illustrated in figure 29. This article is in frequent use; both women and men give much attention to brushing their own long and luxurious locks and cultivating the hair and scalps of their children, the process being regarded as not only directly useful but in some measure sacramental. Ordinarily the hair is parted in the middle and brushed straight, the tresses being permitted to wander at will and never braided or bound or restrained by fillets save in imitation of Caucasian customs on the frontier; though in certain ceremonies the pelage is gathered in a lofty knot on the top-head.[1]

The Seri cradle is merely a bow of paloblanco or other switch with rude cross-sticks lashed on, as shown in figure 30. On this is laid a small pelican-skin robe, with a quantity of pelican down for a diaper, and perhaps a few pelican feathers attached as plumes to wave over the occupant's face; though on the frontier these primitive devices are largely replaced by rags.

Among the important appurtenances of Seri life are the cords used for belts and necklaces, as well as for the attachment of ceremonial headdresses, for converting the kilts into bags, and for numberless minor purposes. The finest of these are made from human hair; and for this purpose the combings are carefully kept, twisted into strands, and wound on thorns or sticks in slender bobbins, such as that illustrated

FIG. 31.—Hair spindle.

[1] Cf. Hardy, Travels, p. 350.

9:Malkin E-5 (1953-1955)1962 NU31 Seri NU31

Coyote figures out probably

as an important and perhaps disreputable figure in the mythology although nothing but scraps and bits of information suggest this. It is possible that there is actually a taboo on eating this animal or perhaps it is so disreputable that eating its flesh would put a gourmant in an inferior position.

How important is the Seri mammalian diet is hard to tell. It certainly looms more heavily during the winter, because in the cool season hunting is easier than during the heat of the summer and in fact this is when most of it is done by the ardent hunters. Too, winter subjects the Seris to greater hazards and is apt to increase their dependence on the desert resources over that during the summer, even if these resources are scantier at that time.

To all of these animals one should add the semi-wild burros running about the extensive Mexican rancherias. The Indians poach on them frequently using their fire arms, usually the .22 caliber rifles. In any case, it appears that during the summer when the field work was carried out, the mammalian diet figures quite lightly on the Seri table.

Food preparation: Very little is done in the preparation of the mammalian meat. All that I could observe was the boiling of it in hot water spiced with salt. The Indians were saying that in order to have the meat of a peccary, deer or bighorn ready to eat one must boil it 2-3 hours. The same procedure is followed with the meat of the burros. In contrast to this, as shall be seen later, fish are boiled as well as roasted while the turtles are also dried and salted. Preparation of meat is done by women, certainly at least in the encampments when they are present.

Food preferences: Some of the Seri food preferences have already been mentioned. At the top of the list as the desirables are the peccary, the deer, the bighorn and the blacktail jackrabbit; at the bottom is the badger, whose meat "is not much good." There is also preference by sex. Females of both the bighorn and peccary are preferred over the males "because they do not have the bad odor like the males." This sort of favoritism also occurs among the Mexicans. However, the Indians did not elaborate beyond this point.

Other economic uses: Apart from meat, hides are also used. The hides of the deer, bighorn and peccary had been used for sleeping mats although this matter has been expressed in the past tense. Miguel Barnett also suggested that the bighorn hides had been used for clothing by the Indians in the past—but he neglected to say how long ago. During Kroeber's stays, no Seris went about in the animal or bird (pelican) skins but earlier when McGee visited them they went about in these simple garments. Judging then by Miguel's memory, the use of the bighorn hide for clothing must be pushed back to the period of World War I or even earlier.

Miguel Barnett indicated that the "fur" of the bighorn had once been worn for the cold season "but not now."

[P 10 A]

* 825 what the informants say about it may be dubious. What is important, though, is the fact that there is far greater number of insects attracted to the lights—immense in fact.

●[513] In some cases, the Seris' idea of midday siesta which everybody, the animals included, take, turns up in their entomology. Thus, the *Tarantula* spends mid-day underground. The *Cicada* does not sing during the hot noon hours. *Chlenius* and *Diplotaxis* also rest at midday although really both are very much nocturnal animals anyway. As for the animals inactive during either time of the day, it had been suggested for some that "they sleep," the same motif showing up in the Seri knowledge of other animal groups.

Anatomy

Little information is available concerning Seri knowledge of the insect anatomy. But where inquiry has been made the Indians showed good knowledge of some of the gross morphological traits of the insects. In all species for which the data are available—a dozen altogether—the following are present: six legs, two wings, two horns (antennae), head and mouth parts usually in the front. An exception here for unaccounted reasons is Tettigonid *Erepemodes* which was said to have four legs. Of course, the Myriapods have "many legs."

Biting outfit is variously located. The wasps and the larger spiders (*Tarantula* and Black Widow) will bite with the fore end of the body but will sting with their rear. The Soliphugid (perfectly harmless in fact) "stings" with the rear end of the body while *Scolopendra* will bite like a viper. The Mutillid also stings. Inclusion of the spiders and Soliphugid as "rear stingers" is unexplainable unless their curving movement suggests a wasp to the Seris.

A most peculiar trait is ascribed to *Tetracha carolina*. This beetle, the Seris say, "has two red light spots on the body which are bright red at night like light." In daytime they indicated the two reddish marks on the elytra. Of course, the insect has no luminescence of any kind even though it is most active at night. This suggests that some sort of really luminescent beetle, a Lampyrid or most likely a *Pyrrhophorus*, does occur in the area and is mistaken for *Tetracha*, although the *Pyrrhophorus* lights are green and located up front.

Miscellaneous Behaviour

In general there is a clear cut recognition of which insects can fly and which cannot. Sometimes, however, this does not correspond to the real situation. If the insect is likely to fly off only at night, while during the day it will seek refuge in crevices from the light, *Saprinus*, for example, it is likely to be included among the supposedly apterous forms.

Web makers are only spiders, the smaller species. Of the Salticid, the informants said that "it sits in the web, only descending down the line to grab a victim." This is not exactly true of the

[P.518]